

Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan

Stormwater and Combined Sewer Overflows Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Stormwater Management

What are the benefits of a storm water program?

An effective stormwater management program will reduce flooding, erosion, washouts and other road damage, and will protect and restore water quality and fish and shellfish habitat in local streams, rivers, lakes, and marine waters. An effective program will achieve these results by preventing further problems and by fixing past problems. This reduces the public and private costs of damage to property, roads, and habitat, as well as threats to public safety.



Photo courtesy of Seattle Public Utilities

Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan

Why should we adopt the *Puget Sound Management Plan* storm water program?

The *Puget Sound Management Plan* is a long-term plan to protect Puget Sound. Cities and counties of all sizes need to manage stormwater runoff if the Sound's water quality and biological resources are to be protected and restored. By adopting the Management Plan's components, a jurisdiction can feel confident that the important aspects of stormwater management are being addressed. Implementation of a comprehensive program would help local governments prevent future storm water problems and fix existing problems. Undertaking the elements of a comprehensive program would also help a jurisdiction avoid the public and private costs of flooding and other problems. The elements of a comprehensive program are based on the best and latest thinking in the field of stormwater management around the basin, and on the experience of hard and costly lessons learned—sometimes too late – in urbanized counties.

What is in the *Puget Sound Management Plan* stormwater program?

The *Puget Sound Management Plan's* stormwater program combines preventive controls for new development and redevelopment; restorative measures to address and fix existing problems; measures to implement innovative practices, such as low impact development; and measures to help jurisdictions monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and best management practices.

What are the elements of the program?

Jurisdictions, including tribal, federal and local governments are called on to develop and implement comprehensive programs that include the following elements:

- Stormwater controls for new development and redevelopment.
- Stormwater site plan review.
- Inspection of construction sites.
- Maintenance of permanent stormwater facilities.
- A source control program.
- Detection and elimination of illicit discharges; water quality response to spills and violations.
- Identification and ranking of existing problems.
- Programs for public education and involvement.
- Integration of the program into watershed or basin planning.
- Development of stable funding such as a utility.
- Monitoring of program implementation and environmental conditions.
- A schedule for implementation.
- Provisions for innovative low impact development technologies, as demonstration projects or directly in development regulations.

Who defines an acceptable program?

Each jurisdiction makes its own choices about priorities for stormwater management. The comprehensive program was revised in 2000 to reflect lessons learned in stormwater management around Puget Sound and recent scientific findings. The *Puget Sound Management Plan's* stormwater program covers the various aspects of stormwater management, but because each jurisdiction has different conditions and problems, the program can be tailored to fit individual jurisdictions' needs.

Why is our current program not adequate?

You may have some elements of the comprehensive program already in place. However, if your jurisdiction is still experiencing flooding and erosion because of development, and if your streams, lakes and marine waters fail to meet water quality standards or to support fish and shellfish because of stormwater problems, probably your program is incomplete and in need of improvement. What is important now is to move forward and build a truly comprehensive program on the foundation of your existing program.

Are local governments the only ones required to take action?

No. Washington Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and federal facility managers, tribes, and businesses must control runoff from state highways, federal facilities, tribal lands, and commercial properties, respectively. The intent is to create a seamless coverage zone where all runoff that drains to Puget Sound is first treated and managed.



Puget Sound Management Plan and NPDES and Endangered Species Act

How does the Puget Sound Management Plan local comprehensive stormwater program differ from the U.S. EPA's NPDES Phase II requirements?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II Rule requires states with designated authority to issue a general stormwater permit for smaller municipalities in urbanized areas that includes the following eight minimum elements. All of these elements are included in the Puget Sound Plan's local stormwater program:

- Public education and outreach
- Public involvement and participation
- Illicit discharge detection and elimination
- Construction site storm water control
- Post-construction storm water management
- Pollution prevention "good housekeeping"
- Implementation of Total Maximum Daily Load or Water Clean-up Plan (TMDL) requirements
- Evaluation and reporting

The NPDES Phase II requirements are the minimum controls for all smaller municipalities in urbanized areas nationwide. Local issues, including the regional commitment to preserving salmon, shellfish growing, and the other rich biological resources of Puget Sound, require greater protection from the problems associated with stormwater runoff.

How does the *Puget Sound Management Plan* stormwater program differ from the Tri-county proposal that was negotiated with NOAA Fisheries Service in 2001?

The two programs are very similar. Two additional elements in the Tri-County draft program related to habitat protection appear in the *Puget Sound Management Plan's* Marine and Freshwater Habitat Program, rather than the Stormwater Program. At the request of local governments who participated in a recent revision process, the Puget Sound Plan's stormwater program is as consistent as possible with expected federal requirements for salmon protection.

Would following the *Puget Sound Management Plan* guarantee a jurisdiction protection from take prohibitions under ESA?

No. Although the Puget Sound Plan's stormwater program is similar to the program negotiated by Tri-County with the federal agencies overseeing ESA implementation, it has not been approved by the federal services under ESA.

Implementation

Can we do it in steps, or do we have to adopt the comprehensive program all at once?

Naturally, implementing a comprehensive stormwater program will need to be done in steps. What is important is to have an implementation plan for the program. What will your jurisdiction do first? What are the local priorities? What will require legislative action? What can be done immediately or at little expense? Each year should include additions to your program that bring it closer to the goal of preventing problems and fixing past mistakes.

How can we involve the public in stormwater management?

A good public involvement program is important to build local understanding of stormwater issues and support for the program. Our publication *Stormwater Education Programs: Selected Examples from Puget Sound* gives examples of how jurisdictions have involved the public in managing storm and surface water. Your jurisdiction's program should be built around local needs and issues in order to build ownership, understanding, and support within your citizenry.



Courtesy of Curtis Hinman, WSU Pierce County Cooperative Extension

Are all jurisdictions expected to have similar programs, regardless of their size?

No. Programs will vary according to a jurisdiction's population, population density, location, relative threat of stormwater to resources, and other local factors. For some jurisdictions, flooding might be the primary concern, while for others road and slope failures are a greater problem. In urbanized or shellfish growing areas, water quality protection may require more attention, while in rural forested areas, road maintenance and habitat restoration might be the focus.

Compliance

What happens if we don't adopt a program or expand our program?

Jurisdictions that fail to properly manage stormwater will continue to experience problems related to property damage and public safety, as well as long-term repair costs for roads, bridges, and water quality. These problems will be exacerbated by the region's continued growth, and problems not corrected now will cost more to fix later.

Jurisdictions that don't adequately manage stormwater runoff will continue to experience adverse effects of stormwater runoff. These might include: flooding, property damage, threats to public safety, polluted waterways, and damaged natural resources. Prevention of these problems before they arise is far more cost-effective than trying to restore and retrofit after-the-fact. Stormwater runoff problems are exacerbated by the region's rapid population growth and land development.

The Puget Sound local comprehensive stormwater program is not mandatory. It helps fulfill the state's mandate to protect Puget Sound under Section 320 of the federal Clean Water Act, and is part of the approved comprehensive conservation plan to protect Puget Sound under the National Estuary Program. In addition, federal agencies have identified stormwater runoff and loss of habitat as one of the factors limiting our region's ability to recover salmon listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Funding

How do jurisdictions pay for stormwater programs?

Jurisdictions have a variety of funding options available to them. A consistent, local funding source is an important component of any effective stormwater management program. Here are some options:

A storm or surface water utility. Local jurisdictions are authorized to charge residents and businesses a fee for surface water services provided. Fees are usually collected with other local services billing, such as water, sewer, or garbage. The amount charged varies by jurisdictions, but \$5.00/month for single-family homes is an average. Some jurisdictions charge by amount of impervious surface. Some give credits for innovative stormwater Best Management Practices. Local road departments and WSDOT are also charged for the amount of impervious surface of the roads and highways in the jurisdiction. Fees pay for a variety of services, including on-going operation and maintenance of publicly-owned stormwater facilities, drainage basin planning, education and outreach, water quality programs, monitoring, and capital projects. Generally, such a fee is predictable and consistent and is considered a valuable tool for on-going management of storm and surface water.

Real estate excise tax or REET. REET funds are used by many jurisdictions to help pay for stormwater management, including planning and capital facilities. Jurisdictions have flexibility in how these funds are distributed throughout departments, so long as it is spent on growth-related issues. There is a lot of competition between local programs for these dollars, so REET is often not a predictable source of funding for stormwater management.

General fund. A jurisdiction's general fund, accruing from property taxes and B&O taxes, may also be used for stormwater management. Again, because these funds are distributed throughout the jurisdictions' departments, this is not always a predictable source of funding.

Permit fees and drainage impact fees. These are fees charged to cover the costs of reviewing permits and paying for capital improvements related to drainage for new development. They are one-time fees and help ensure that "growth pays for growth."

Road fund. A jurisdiction's road fund, accruing from gasoline tax, can be used for some components of a stormwater program. In particular, it can be used to design and build capital projects related to road drainage or habitat restoration projects related to roads.

Grant and loan funding. There are a variety of grants and loans available for stormwater projects, including from Washington State's Revolving Fund, the Public Works Trust Fund, and the Centennial Clean Water Fund. Other grant and loan opportunities come up periodically. These are generally good for one-time projects, but cannot be relied on for on-going stormwater program activities.

Revenue bonds. Jurisdictions can also issue revenue bonds, backed by rate revenues, to pay for large capital projects.

Efficiencies with neighboring jurisdictions. Just as counties and cities combine their resources to serve multiple jurisdictions with solid waste facilities or other public services, cities and counties can develop intergovernmental agreements to share the cost for some elements of the stormwater program. For example, in a rural county the county and several cities could join together to hire staff in common for the source control, monitoring, and public education and involvement elements of the stormwater program.